

VZCZCXRO2991
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHBK #2307/01 2530854
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 100854Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8216
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHNS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7439
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9947
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1648
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5765
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1894
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0095
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 6959

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 BANGKOK 002307

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN THAILAND: NOT ALL VIOLENCE INSURGENT
RELATED; LOCAL POLITICS, DRUGS AND LACK OF JUSTICE PLAY
ROLES

REF: A. BANGKOK 2149 (MIDDAY BOMB ATTACK)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2226 (CONFLICTING GOALS HURTING EDUCATION)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 845 (INSURGENTS PUSH THE ENVELOPE)
[1](#)D. BANGKOK 1980 (ENDURING VIOLENCE)
[1](#)E. 03 BANGKOK 2830 (BLACKLISTS AND BODYCOUNTS)

BANGKOK 00002307 001.4 OF 005

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The violence in Thailand's Deep South cannot exclusively be attributed to the insurgency, according to a range of academic, government, and NGO contacts we engaged on an August 16-19 trip to Thailand's southern three provinces. Other key factors behind incidents of violence/murder in the deep south are brass knuckle local politics (with local administrative elections held September 6), personal business conflicts, and criminal rackets/drug trafficking. These same interlocutors emphasized that violence appears to be pervasive in Thai society, not just in the Deep South. They also underscored a widespread feeling of delayed or unbalanced justice in dealing with the conflict in the South, especially within the Muslim community. This is the last in a series of three cables reporting on key issues affecting Thailand's Deep South. The first (REF A) touched on the lingering impact of the June 8 mosque massacre in Narathiwat; the second (REF B) addressed the detrimental impact the conflict has on the educational system.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: We were surprised by the ubiquity of the perception that a significant portion of fatal attacks/violence in the deep south -- our contacts cited as low as 10 and as high as 70 percent, with 30-50 percent the norm -- is unrelated to the insurgency. That suggests that a political settlement to the conflict would not resolve all the problems afflicting the Deep South, though the majority of current deadly violence in the three border provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, and Yala does appear in fact related to the separatist movement. While methamphetamines is the scourge of youth elsewhere in Thailand, the Deep South faces its own drug epidemic of the hallucinatory krathom leaf and a drug cocktail based on krathom used by up to 70-80 percent of rural youth in the south. End summary and comment.

¶3. (U) Fatal incidents in the South are automatically and sometimes incorrectly attributed to the insurgency, Australian academic and longtime southern conflict researcher Dr. Mark Askew asserted during an August 17 seminar at the Prince of Songkhla University. Askew reiterated the themes of his August 9 Bangkok Post op-ed, in which he claimed approximately 30 percent of all fatal violence in the South attributed to the insurgency is related to personal, political, or criminal disputes. Taking the particularly violent day of July 17 as his snapshot case study, Askew related how two of five murderous attacks could be traced to local political competition between competing groups, two appeared to be insurgent related, and a fifth remained unclear.

¶4. (C) As part of his ongoing research, Askew is attempting to conduct comparative analysis with other zones of conflict, such as Russia's southern Caucasus, of what could be called a "twinning" effect between insurgent activities and a rise in general criminality. Adilan Ali-Ishak of the Yala Muslim Attorney Center (MAC) cited a report from Police Lt. General Adul Saengsingkaew, former Director of the RTP Southern Forward Command, which assessed that, of the almost 25,000 incidents since 2004, only about 6,000 were related to the insurgency. Police Maj. Gen. Saritchai Venakavieng, the chief of forensic investigations in Yala, affirmed to us that some of the violence described in the national media as insurgent-related is purely criminal, even though insurgents might be involved as hired guns. He suggested the principal culprit was drug trafficking, which he asserted funded the

BANGKOK 00002307 002.4 OF 005

insurgent movement. He also noted that carjackings were on the rise in Songkhla and Hat Yai as insurgents steal motorcycles and pickup trucks for use in the Deep South.

¶5. (U) All of our interlocutors agreed that while the number of fatal attacks had waned from the 2006-07 peak, the intensity of the attacks is increasing. Police officials in Yala said this is because insurgents are trying for more spectacular attacks, such as burning or beheading corpses, in order to grab headlines. (Note: Statistics show that the number of attacks decreased markedly from 2007 to 2008; for the first half of 2009, however, the number of attacks had increased compared to the same period in 2008, though not back to 2007 levels. See REF D)

¶6. (SBU) Despite perceptions based on Bangkok media coverage of violence in the Deep South that the insurgency-affected provinces are by far and away the most dangerous places in Thailand, some North and Northeast provinces have similar numbers of people dying from violent causes, according to statistics from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Public Health. Long known as the Land of Smiles, Thailand is a surprisingly violent place. When we closely examined the traditional level of violent deaths in 2003 around a three-month spike associated with fugitive former PM Thaksin's "War on Drugs," we discovered a base rate of 300 such deaths a month, with a rate of violent deaths based on population size twice the rate of the U.S. (REF E). Several of our South contacts told us that even if the Thai military -- whose presence some in the insurgent movement blame for the on-going conflict -- were to withdraw, the violence in the South would remain close to current levels.

¶7. (SBU) In 2007, the last year for which official statistics are available, the provinces with the highest rates of violent deaths per 100,000 residents were, surprisingly, Maha Sarakham in the Northeast and Nonthaburi, just north of Bangkok. Yala ranked ninth, with Pattani and Narathiwat coming in at 20th and 28th, respectively. However, after disaggregating RTG statistics for non-accidental violent

deaths, the insurgency-affected provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat rank second through fourth on a violent deaths per capita basis, with only the central province of Samut Sakhon being more dangerous per capita; see statistics below in paragraph 18.

Local politics not for the faint-hearted

¶8. (SBU) Thai Senator Anusart Suwanmongkhol told us August 16 that the March 2008 bombing of his C.S. Pattani hotel in the South (REF C) was the handiwork of his local political rivals from the Wadah group, coming two days before an election candidate filing deadline and intended as an act of intimidation (Note: it has been presumed for years that insurgents also act as guns for hire, carry out most of the violent acts, and will "disguise" political or economic-related hits to allow the insurgency to claim credit. End note). Askew and several other seminar participants predicted a continued wave of deaths associated with local politics in the run-up to the September 6 election for local district/tambon administrators.

¶9. (C) MAC attorney Adilan agreed that many of the violent deaths attributed to the insurgency could be classified as personal or local politics-related killings. He cited the case of Imam Abdul Karim Usuh, who was arrested in 2007 on what he claimed were false charges of being an insurgent, leveled by a police informant who had a personal issue with Karim Usuh. Usuh was subsequently killed in January 2009, three months after authorities released him. While many contacts at the time suggested Usuh might have been the victim of a targeted killing by unidentified security authorities, Adilan argued that it was a result of a personal dispute over influence in the village.

BANGKOK 00002307 003.10 OF 005

Burgeoning Drug problem: Krathom and 8x100

¶10. (SBU) Youth in southern Thailand are subject to the temptation of drug abuse that is rampant throughout Thailand, albeit with an interesting local twist. Use of methamphetamines -- known throughout Thailand as "yaa bah" -- and marijuana are common, but the preferred drugs in the South are krathom and a peculiar cocktail mixed with krathom known as 8x100 ("eight by one hundred"). The leaves of the krathom tree, native to Southeast Asia, have long been used in folk medicine, but its use is currently illegal in Thailand. (Note: Krathom is a category 5 narcotic, the same level as marijuana, and carries a maximum sentence of one year. End note.) Manual laborers tout the stimulant effects of low doses of krathom, saying they can work longer without tiring. At high doses it is a sedative and can produce euphoria, and traditional healers have used it as a pain killer, medicine for diarrhea, and to treat opium addiction. Krathom trees grow naturally throughout southern Thailand and people collect the leaves to sell for 20 baht each.

¶11. (SBU) A new combination of krathom with other substances emerged in 2006. This highly addictive drink, known as 4x100, consists of krathom leaves, ground up anti-mosquito coils, cough syrup, and soda, and is said to be a hallucinogen. Earlier in 2009 a new mixture emerged in the South, adding methamphetamines, chemicals from fluorescent light tubes, tobacco, and yogurt to the original formula. The 8x100 mixture is highly addictive, and our contacts say its use in the South is pervasive. Yala Vice-Governor Grisada Bunrat told us that 80 percent of rural youth in the South are using these substances; Angkhana Neelapaichit of the Working Group on Justice for Peace said that her local contacts report that 70 percent of all youth in the South are hooked on either krathom or 8x100.

Where is Justice?

¶12. (C) At the August 17 seminar, several participants emphasized the continuing sense of delayed or uneven justice in the South as a factor undermining support for the government and increasing passive sympathy for the "movement," as the separatists are euphemistically called. Human Rights Watch researcher Sunai Phasuk told seminar participants that legitimacy for the RTG in the South comes from justice, not power, and for there to be peace, there must be respect for the rule of law on all sides. British academic Duncan McCargo said that this sense of injustice is compounded by a pervasive feeling in the South that local people do not have a voice, and that they cannot stand up and ask questions or challenge authorities.

¶13. (C) MAC's Adilan expanded on this sentiment August 19, telling us that people will come to consult with MAC lawyers, but refuse to file official complaints because they consider it to be a useless exercise. Adilan raised the example of compensation for people affected by the 2004 Tak Bai incident, in which 78 Muslims were crushed to death during transport from a protest site to an interrogation center. Though the central government had allocated funds for compensation, local officials often justify a refusal to compensate victims by accusing them of being part of the insurgency and citing laws that deny compensation for insurgents. Adilan argued these people should be considered innocent until proven guilty in court.

Bangkok Bickers, Military Controls (and irritates)

¶14. (C) Prime Minister Abhisit has vowed to initiate "politics leading the military" in southern policy and return control of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative

BANGKOK 00002307 004.2 OF 005

Center (SBPAC) to the Prime Minister's office (REF D). However, Bangkok's continuing preoccupation with internal politics at the national level leads our contacts to predict the military will continue to play the leading role in the Deep South. Police Lieutenant General Phira Phoumphet, the Commissioner of the Southern Border Province Police Bureau, said that Abhisit's avowed goal of "politics leading the military" (kan mueang nam kan tahaan) is a great idea in theory, but in practice will be very difficult to implement, especially since the military controls most of the budget.

¶15. (C) Other interlocutors within both the Malay Muslim and Thai Buddhist communities noted that Bangkok's internal political fixation, coupled with the military's control of the budget, has prompted Southerners to question what has become of the billions of baht supposedly earmarked for their area. Both Adilan and the mayor of Yala town lamented that what money does make it through the military to distribution locally is too often controlled by politicians, including members of parliament.

¶16. (C) Misbehavior by troops assigned to the South continues to be an additional irritant for locals. Sa-nguan Intharak, head of the Narathiwat Teachers Federation, said soldiers were doing more harm than good and called for the withdrawal of the military from the South. He told us: "they get drunk and rowdy and harass the Buddhist residents; they cannot go into Muslim villages because of accusations of misconduct, including sexual harassment." Phongsak Yingchoncharoen, the mayor of Yala township, said Yala faced similar problems with 3rd Army (North) soldiers. Phongsak did not think the military would withdraw, but called for a change in their strategy. He recommended a kind of incentive system that would encourage villages to be responsible for their own security and safety, before concluding that the plan would not be practicable in light of military business interests.

¶17. (SBU) Adilan pointed to the myriad government programs

often tagged as re-education opportunities as another problem for people in the South. The military, the SBPAC, the police, and other security organizations all have such training programs, and Adilan said it seemed they targeted the same individuals for participation. According to Adilan, MAC lawyers objected to the perceived use of religion to select people for training, as all participants were Muslim. He also asserted that villagers directed to attend these programs lost wages and sometimes even their jobs without receiving any compensation. According to Adilan, many of the people invited to training courses felt like they were being treated like criminals while being interrogated, photographed, and required to provide DNA samples.

¶18. Violent Death Statistics - 2007

Province	total Deaths*	incl:Non-accidental#	per capita
¶1. Samut Sakhon	630	288	61.77
¶2. Pattani	514	336	52.77
¶3. Yala	501	246	52.40
¶4. Narathiwat	490	327	46.10
¶5. Phuket	443	112	36.35
¶6. Nonthaburi	1,562	300	29.66
¶7. Tak	373	131	24.75
¶8. Chachoengsao	545	157	23.91
¶9. Ratchaburi	616	195	23.49
¶10. Chonburi	1,472	262	21.45

* The Ministry of Public Health aggregated total deaths including transportation accidents and other accidents such as drownig, animal attacks, burning, falling, etc.

Non-accidental deaths include suicide, killed by others, death by unknown causes, legal procedures or war, and death by unknown causes.

The per capita rate indicates the number of non-accidental deaths per 100,000 residents of a given province.

BANGKOK 00002307 005.4 OF 005

Source: Thai Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health
JOHN